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A common belief for a language learner is that the most beneficial way to learn a new language would be to have the learner experience the language in the context where it is used on a daily basis, inside and outside of the classroom (Yager, 1998). However, living and studying abroad for a language learner can also be a time of great challenges and great change. By learning their target language in a new and unfamiliar context, the learner will be discovering and creating language learning strategies in their new environment.

By living abroad, one is just not learning to speak a new language, but also one is learning how to put that language into writing. Living abroad can be an effective strategy in improving writing skills, but is shown to develop slower than that of the learners' oral skills (Sasaki, 2016). When Studying Abroad (SA) at the university level, many new changes in the students learning may occur. Among the changes in the learner that may occur are changes in their writing strategies such as local planning, rhetorical refining, and their motivation to continue to improve on their writing skills (Sasaki, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2011; Spack, 1997; Wu & Zhang, 2017). A series of studies by Sasaki (2004, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2016), have shown the positive benefits that SA can have on the language learners' writing development; these benefits are not just attributed to their time while living and studying abroad, but also attributed to positive long-term effects to their time for when they return home (Sasaki, 2011).

The study abroad experience proved to be beneficial for the language learner to maintain their language abilities and motivation to improve on their writing abilities (Sasaki, 2011). This finding shows the importance that the studying abroad context can have on, not just improving the writing of Second Language (L2) learners, but also demonstrating what effects it could have on their motivation to improve on their own L2 writing abilities. These areas of improvement and motivation have led

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me to a series of questions to explore further. These exploratory questions are what effect does studying abroad have on the motivation of the learner to continue to improve on their writing skills and development? What new strategies were formed by their exposure to a new learning environment? And finally, how has the learners' language changed, due to this new environment? The learning environment plays a vital role on how the students learn a language (Wu & Zhang, 2017). Therefore, exploring the answers to these questions are important, as it helps provide us with a better understanding of the effects of learning English writing in the SA context.

Motivation

The opportunity to learn in a SA context gives the learners a chance to be exposed to a variety of situations in using their L2 that perhaps would be of greater challenge to encounter in an AH (at home) context; a term coined by Sasaki (2016). It is evidence to see researchers would be interested in exploring these situations. A main contribution to the learners' motivation would be by being exposed to the language on a daily basis. Instead of viewing language as something as exclusively internal to them, learners view it as a means of functioning in society. (Chomsky, 2006; Halliday, 2004). This type of interaction could be greatly motivating for the learners, because they are in a language learning position which requires them to integrate into the target language and in doing so the target language community. This type of motivation is referred to as 'integrative motivation' by Gardner and Lambert (1972), and it is seen as preferable to instrumental motivation which is the learners sole motivation in learning language to obtain a high test score or fulfill a work requirement. Extrinsic motivation is associated with lower levels of self-esteem and higher anxiety compared to intrinsic motivation (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). The opportunities to use the language in a variety of contexts, which perhaps they could not encounter in their home country, could be of great beneficial use for their intrinsic motivation into further developing their abilities in their target language (Yager, 1998). They may face challenges that previously they did not know existed, and as a result give them more incentive and desire to further develop their language skills.

It has been shown that learning in the SA context can create opportunities for learners to generate social circles in which they write their target language in a non-academic setting, this in return could influence and affect their academic writing (Sasaki, 2009, 2011). Sasaki (2011) discovered in one particular group, that in order to stay in touch with their First Language (L1) and Second Language (L2) SA classmates, the SA students created English-speaking imagined communities, by corresponding with their classmates in English, via emails. According to Kanno & Nor-

ton (2003), “*Imagined communities* refer to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination” (p.241). Such communities offer the learner a chance to continue on improving their writing abilities outside of the classroom in an environment in which they are learning writing outside of the constraints of an academic setting. When the access to learning the target language in the academic environment is not available, imagined communities could be ways for the learner to stay intrinsically motivated to continue to learn their target language (Sasaki, 2009). Without these imagined communities, when the learner returns to their home country, reasons for using their L2 may also vanish. Therefore, in order not to lose the relationships they made when living abroad, these communities give them reasons to continue to keep developing and improving their language skills.

It was prevalent to see the writing of emails contributed in motivating SA students to continue to work on and improve their writing abilities (Sasaki, 2009, 2011). With the continue advancement of technology it creates chances for learners to continue on such forms of writing for even after they return to their home country. Technology plays a vital role in the varieties of communities that can be imagined (Kanno & Norton, 2003). Therefore, it is of importance to take advantage of these technologies so the learner can stay motivated to continue their language studies.

Sasaki (2004), found that the AH students connected their in-class experiences to their own improvement on their English writing, while the SA students connected their overall experiences abroad as their major contribution to their improvement in writing. Such experiences abroad could lead to motivation to further create new writing strategies in order to further development and improve their writing skills. In an SA context, the learner perhaps could experience scenarios in which their target language is used in ways that perhaps are not as easily obtainable in a AH context.

Strategies

Sasaki (2016) states, “SA experiences improve motivation to write better by using effective strategies” (p.174). However, does motivation create effective strategies, or do effective strategies lead to more motivation in language learning? The creation of imagined communities for the SA students can be an example of both. Sasaki (2011) discovered that after the SA students returned back to their home country, they created an imagined community with their English-speaking friends by keeping in touch with them through emails. In a previous study, Sasaki (2009) remarked, “although they did not receive emails from such friends every day, they imagined their life through received emails, and spent time thinking how best to re-

ply to them” (p.68). In a later study, a particular group of students felt that the use of email exchanging was a contributor to the improvement of their writing (Sasaki, 2011). Eventually, the other SA groups in the study joined in by creating their own cyberspace influenced imagined communities. However, only the initial group that mentioned, was credited with the imagined communities as a source to draw upon when writing academic English assignments, the other groups referred back to their English as a Second Language (ESL) classes (Sasaki, 2011). It was the motivation of the SA groups to keep in touch with their English-speaking friends that created this writing strategy for them, and in return this use of the strategy helped lead them to further improve on their academic writing abilities, however; in the end each student used the strategy that they felt best suited them. The learning context did seem to influence in how they choose their strategy.

When living in a new country, a person could face the challenges of not just learning a new language, but also learning about new cultural beliefs and ideas. This cultural adjustment in the educational environment can be a big obstacle for the learner, as their previous learning habits and strategies may not be as effective in their new learning environment (Spack, 1997). Due to the new educational environment, the learner may be faced with the challenge of creating new strategies in order to meet the demands of their classroom assignments. In Sasaki’s (2011) interview of students, it was mentioned how the students struggled at first in their ESL writing classes; a cause of this was due to because the longest assignment they have ever written prior to their study abroad experience was just one paragraph. However, over time the students writing abilities did progress. Sasaki (2011) recognized that, “After having read relevant literature and writing multiple drafts, however, they learned how to achieve higher grades” (p.98). It was through the process of just experiencing the new learning environment, which eventually led to a change in the students approach to writing in an academic context.

It is valuable to study how the learners’ beliefs shape their perceptions on writing strategies (Ou, 2013). A study by Sasaki (2007) showed the influence the SA context had on learners when it came to *Local Planning*, or “planning what to write” (p.611). In the study, it showed that both the SA and AH students used Local Planning, however, the SA group paid more attention to it during their 4th year of writing at their university in Japan (Sasaki, 2007). SA students addressed that because of the experience of learning planning strategies in their ESL class, it helped them prepare and organize better when writing (Sasaki, 2007). However, Sasaki’s (2004) previous study contradicted this as the study of the SA and AH students showed no such difference in their Local Planning (Sasaki, 2007). This shows that each student can react in their own unique way (Yager, 1998). Therefore, with this in mind, individual factors should also be taken into account, as not all learners

come from the same educational background or have the same learning styles.

In Sasaki's (2004) study it was found that 'rhetorical refining' was an effective writing strategy for some students. In this strategy, a student would look for a variety of expressions and use the expression that they best felt was appropriate for their situation. An English as a Foreign Language (EFL) student who improved on this strategy pointed out, that by his senior year he had become more used to using English, so was able to use better judgment in choosing more appropriate expressions. (Sasaki, 2004). However, two EFL students, who improved on this strategy, credited their improvement to their ESL and non-ESL university classes and "the increase in their English vocabulary during their stay abroad" (Sasaki, 2007, p.564). Therefore, individuals can find their own writing strategies, no matter where the learning context happens to be. Because the learning contexts of where the students improved this strategy do differ, it could also influence the use of how they use this strategy. From the students' responses, it shows the influence that context could have on how learners obtain writing strategies.

Linguistic development

The SA context could give the learner a new set of learning opportunities, opportunities that perhaps were not available in their AH context. Such an opportunity could be that of being exposed to a new set of linguistic choices (Perez-Vidal & Juan-Garau, 2011). This varied exposure of linguistic choices could lead to a variety of outcomes, that perhaps could not be obtained if in the AH context, except in a classroom being taught under explicit instruction. The variations of encounters with speakers of the target language outside of the classroom could contribute to their linguistic development (Yager, 1998). However, the AH learner could gain more benefit of explicit instruction than that of the SA learner, who might come in contact with grammatical structure via outside the classroom where no instruction is being given to them, or as Yang (2016) refers it to as, "survival strategy" (p.80). This sort of strategy may not always prove to be a productive strategy for the SA learner, as the SA environment may not always be the most beneficial (Wu & Zhang, 2017). The reason is that without explicit instruction, especially of that in their First Language (L1), it could be a guessing game for the SA learner. On the other hand, AH learners can benefit from explicit teaching, by being taught the linguistic rule in their classroom (Yang, 2016). This line of argument is supported by other researchers in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), stating the importance of the cognitive processes of the learner 'noticing the input', comprehending the corrections, integrating and producing correct output (Gass, 1988). The relevance of this noticing theory in this study is that direct corrective feedback provided in the

AH classroom might be more effective due to the errors being located and corrected in the writing tasks; whereas, only providing input relying on the survival strategy might be ineffective due to no errors corrections being given. Therefore, even in a SA context, explicit teaching is valuable for the learner. The learner cannot assume the meaning behind a language by just being around it. Further explanation could be needed.

Even though explicit instruction on linguistic rules may not always be available for the SA learner, it should be taken into consideration that they are still being exposed to a variety of linguistic choices, choices that perhaps may never be addressed in the classroom of an AH context. By being exposed to these varieties, these questions could be brought up in the class in a SA context. In a AH context, it perhaps may only be brought up if the instructors themselves decide to introduce it, even doing this though, transferring these linguistic developments into their writing can be a challenging process for the learner. According to Perez-Vidal & Juan-Garau (2011) findings, the authors noted, “Moreover, given that oral practice is highly accessible while abroad, in contrast with written practice, it is not surprising to find a slightly higher impact of the SA context on linguistic development in oral performance over written performance” (p.181). As it seems, according to this statement, that the oral proficiency that a learner gains in a SA context does not necessarily transfer over to their writing skills equally. What pedagogical approaches could teachers take to address this issue? By addressing this issue, students will better be able to take these new linguistic choices and apply it to better improve their writing proficiency.

Conclusion

“Both teachers and students of foreign languages have long assumed that study or living abroad is extremely beneficial in achieving a high level of proficiency in a foreign language, and perhaps even obligated for most learners” (Yager, 1998, p.898). However, just by being exposed to the language does not mean that it will transfer over to the learners’ proficiency skills. This can be even more prevalent in the learners’ writing abilities, as the advancement of the learners’ written proficiency will develop slower than that compared to their oral proficiencies (Vidal & Juan-Garau, 2011; Sasaki, 2016).

The continuous advancement in technology offers the learner to write in a context that could be more similar to that of their oral skills. With the use of emails, social media, and text messaging, it gives the learners the opportunity to apply these new linguistic findings into their writings. Furthermore, by experiencing the classroom in a SA context, the learner is placed in a situation in which they will have to

meet new demands and expectations of their own writing abilities. As a result, in order to meet these demands new strategies will be formed, as their previous strategies would become obsolete. However, not all students have the opportunity to live and learn a language abroad, so it would be of great benefit to AH students to form these imagined communities as a strategy to continue on the development of their writing proficiency (Sasaki, 2011). Creating lesson plans in the EFL classroom that meets what the students intend to use the language for might create more positive results for when they use the language in an authentic situation. (Wu & Zhang, 2017). Thus, in return, it could better prepare students on having more productive writing strategies before they enter the SA environment.

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